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ABSTRACT

This manual presents a program of instruction, the Basic Skills Instructional System, which coordinates a number of teaching strategies into a single instructional system. Section 1 describes the organizational phase of the system: (1) teacher expectation; (2) resistance from low achieving students; (3) avoiding confrontations; (4) management of class time; and (5) effective teaching behaviors. In the second section, the development phase of instruction is described. During this phase, new concepts or basic skills are introduced to the class. Ways in which materials are presented to ensure that all students achieve a basic understanding of what is expected of them are outlined. Section 3 is devoted to a description of the seatwork phase of instruction; the aim of this phase is to consolidate learning and to increase students' proficiency in a specific, narrow area. The fourth section provides a description of effective practices in planning, assigning, and evaluating homework. In the final section, effective techniques are outlined for reviewing critical materials so that students can retain knowledge and consolidate learned skills. (JD)

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RESEARCH BULLETIN

The Basic Skills Instructional System: A Manual for Improving the Reading and Language Arts Skills of Low Achieving Students

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The Basic Skills Instructional System: A Manual for Improving the Reading and Language Arts Skills of Low Achieving Students

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F.E.R.D.C. Notes on This Bulletin

The authors of this handbook are members of the Foundations Department, in the College of Education of the University of Florida.

The school improvement project, a research-based collaborative inservice program designed to improve instruction in classes serving low-achieving students housed in the foundation, provided the organization an energy source for this document. The authors patterned this handbook after one developed by Thomas Good, Douglas Grouws, and Howard Embier, *Active Mathematics Teaching*, with the blessing and support of these authors.

F.E.R.D.C. is happy to publish this handbook as a research bulletin with the belief that it can be a substantial source of assistance to all teachers, and especially those who have classes of low-achieving students in the area of reading and language arts. Readers further interested in the school improvement project should contact Rodman Webb or Pat Ashton.

Charlie T. Council, Executive Secretary

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Introduction

Educational Research and Classroom Practice

Improving the academic achievement scores of low-achieving students is a frustrating task fraught with difficulties. Teachers dedicated to overcoming these difficulties often have turned to educational research for guidance. Until recently they have come away disappointed. Many studies were poorly conducted and those that were done well offered a vast array of conflicting findings. No competent reviewer of educational research was able to provide instructional strategies that had proven effective across multiple studies.

Today the situation has changed dramatically. Recent reviews of teacher effectiveness research have provided a set of specific teaching behaviors that have correlated consistently with academic achievement gains among low-achieving students. Correlational and experimental studies have found successful teachers of low-achieving students demonstrate the following behaviors and attitudes:

1. Effective teachers believe that all students, even those with a history of academic failure, can learn. They don't give up on students or write some pupils off as unteachable.

2. Effective teachers define their jobs primarily in terms of instruction and organize their classroom activities around this aim.

3. The major portion of class time in effective teachers' classrooms is devoted to instruction and learning-oriented tasks.

4. Effective teachers know what is going on in their classrooms at all times. They circulate around the room, organize friendly but task-oriented practice sessions and recitation experiences, use sequenced and structured materials, keep students focused on learning, and keep

careful records of student progress. Instructional goals are clear and student performance is monitored.

5. Effective teachers frequently ask students low cognitive level, straightforward questions. They carefully fit the difficulty of the question to the ability of the student queried. As a result, students have an error rate of 20 percent or less. Repetition is used to reinforce instruction and a slow pace is employed when needed to insure that instruction does not move faster than students' understanding.

6. Emotional climate in classrooms run by effective teachers is warm, with a conspicuous absence of hostility, harping or reprimands on the part of the instructor. Effective teachers keep a sharp eye on the social dynamics of the class to insure that students are not the source of emotional or behavioral disruption. Teacher rebukes and discipline maneuvers are held to a minimum.

Teacher effectiveness research results are slowly finding their way out of research journals and monographs (where they are often camouflaged in torturous English and statistical jargon) and into the journals of classroom practitioners where research results are translated into specific teaching suggestions. Too often, however, these suggestions are presented, as they have been presented here, as a list of desirable teaching behaviors, of "things teachers should do." While helpful, lists of teaching hints are not easily put into practice. Suggested teaching behaviors do not cohere around a discernible theoretical structure and are not organized into a straightforward system of instruction. Desirable teaching behaviors are listed without specific reference to subject matter being taught. Thus, teachers are expected to devise their own organizational and theoretical schemes and to apply broad, generic suggestions to their own subject matter areas. Teachers have found this difficult and, as a result, teacher effectiveness findings are not being broadly utilized where they are likely to do the most good, in classrooms dominated by low-achieving students.

This manual is designed to help basic skills, reading and language arts teachers to improve the academic performance of their low-achieving students. The manual presents a straightforward program of instruction that we call the Basic Skills Instructional System (or BSIS for short). The power of this program is not found in any single teaching suggestion, but in the coordination of a number of teaching strategies into a single instructional system.

Students' academic performance is most likely to be improved when the instructional system suggested here is used daily, over a full academic year. The likelihood of improvement is increased significantly if all basic skills teachers in a school work collaboratively and employ the same system of instruction. And the likelihood of improvement increases still further when the system is employed over a number of years so that academically troubled students can benefit from its accumulative effect.

One of the benefits of the Basic Skills Instructional System is that it is easily learned and can be adopted by teachers with little or no formal training. However, educators and school systems wishing assistance in adopting and/or evaluating BSIS can get help by writing Pat Ashton or Rodman Webb at the Improvement Project, College of Education, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611, or by calling 904-392-0724.

A Word to Basic Skills Teachers

For the past few years we have been working with basic skills teachers. Again and again teachers voiced such frustrations as these:

> I can tell (basic skills classes) every day that they have to do well in English, but they don't seem to care. I don't think it's me...You can't stand there with a cattle prod to keep them awake.
>
> (I) don't want to sit down to continue to work...with (basic skills students) when (I) know they're not going to remember it. I...sit down with some of these students to go

over (the material) and they'll know it and can do it right then and there. (But then I) get up and leave and come back five minutes later and they've forgotten...it completely.

You can't do much with (basic skills students). I don't know why that is, but there are things they just can't do. So you don't see much progress and you don't feel much is going on.

I don't know if they will ever get (the basic skills), no matter how hard we work them.

As a basic skills teacher, you have no doubt heard comments like these; perhaps you have expressed such concerns yourself. While we recognize the frustrations that these comments reflect, we are convinced that such attitudes are not accurate or necessary. Basic skills students can learn, they can be motivated and their own defiant protestations notwithstanding, they do care about their academic deficiencies and will take pride in academic success. But turning a history of academic failure around is not easy and will not be done overnight. Progress will be slow and frustrations will abound. But with persistence, help from colleagues, and a researcy-based teaching system, you can help low-achieving students do better in school and in life.

How to Use This Manual

An outline of the Basic Skills Instructional System is presented in Table 1. It provides an overview of the instructional program and will help you organize the many details presented in this manual. You will note that the outline is divided into five sections that correspond to sections in the manual.

There is no eason for you to blindly accept the teaching suggestions made here. Therefore, each section begins with a description of specific teaching suggestions. Too often, however, these suggestions are presented, as they have been

presented here, as a list of desirable teaching behaviour, of "things teachers should do." While helpful, lists of teaching hints are not easily put into practice. Suggested teaching behaviors do not cohere around a discernible theoretical structure and are not organized into a straightforward system of instruction. Desirable teaching behaviours are listed without specific reference to subject matter being taught. Thus, teachers are expected to devise their own organizational and theoretical schemes and to apply broad, generic suggestions to their own subject matter areas. Teachers have found this difficult and, as a result, teacher effectiveness findings are not being broadly utilized where they are likely to do the most good, in classrooms dominated by low-achieving students.

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Section 1: The Organizational Phase

Description of the Organizational Phase

Teacher Expectations

The organizational phase of the Basic Skills Instructional System is intended to put you in control at the very start of the class and to reinforce in the students the expectation that they are in school to study and to learn. During this phase you should calm the class, take attendance, make announcements, and focus student attention on the tasks of the day.

Student Resistance

Compensatory education students usually have poor study habits and often poor social habits as well. They are likely to come to class late; forget their books, papers, pencils or assignments; and resist teacher efforts to reshape these bad habits. Further, some compensatory education students have short tempers and react hostilely when teachers correct their behavior. As the result, some teachers try to keep the peace by ignoring all but major classroom infractions while others try to meet every misbehavior with a novel response. Neither of these approaches is likely to be effective.

Avoiding Confrontations

Most compensatory education students badly need emotional and structural support from the teacher. But how can a teacher provide a firm and reasonable structure of rules and expectations and yet avoid hostile confrontations when students misbehave? The answer—more easily stated than achieved—is found in minimizing the opportunities for student misbehavior and maximizing the opportunity for academic success among students. You will not achieve these goals

overnight, but with diligence and planning you can make progress over time.

Start Class Quickly

You should let students know clearly and repeatedly that you expect them to be punctual. When the bell rings, class members should know that you expect students to be in their seats and quiet. Start each class by quieting students. Your demeanor should be friendly but businesslike. Once you have the class's attention, move directly to announcements and taking attendance. It's important to complete these tasks quickly so that the class does not become unruly while you are attending to these chores.

Stumbling Blocks

Taking Attendance

Sometimes when classes are large, teachers lose control of students while taking attendance. If this happens, we suggest that you take attendance later in the period or get a student to take attendance for you. It is not a good idea to allow a growing crescendo of noise to dominate the first few minutes of class. We have been in classrooms where teachers did not take control of the class for ten or fifteen minutes into the period. When this occurs, valuable time is wasted and the teacher has difficulty regaining control and establishing the academic momentum of the class.

Tardy Students

Some students are going to be tardy and come to class unprepared. Such behavior is likely to disrupt the class. Correcting such behavior may invite arguments that will disrupt the class still further. It therefore is wise to tell students in advance what they should expect and what they should do if they come to class late or

Have A System

unprepared. You must plan ahead. Set up a system and inform students of what that system entails. There is no one best system; you will have to devise a plan that is best for you. One teacher we know had late students sign a paper by the door and proceed quietly to their seats. After being late twice in a grading period, the students were referred to the principal's office. If a student was tardy for a third time, the teacher wrote a letter home. The advantage of such a system is that students actively participate in the monitoring of their own misbehavior. The teacher does not need to take class time to admonish students; tardy students were called to the office later in the day.

Similar systems can be employed to deal with students who come to class unprepared or without pencils, paper or books. The exact details of the system you use are not important. What is important is that appropriate student behavior be consistently rewarded and inappropriate behavior consistently discouraged in ways that are fair, predictable and non-disruptive.

Effective Teaching Behaviors

Greeting Students

Effective teachers often stand at the classroom door between periods so that they can monitor pupil behavior and greet students as they enter the room. Making yourself available for conversation and questions between periods establishes a friendly mood and minimizes annoying disruptions at the beginning of class.

Remember that first impressions are

important, especially for teachers. During your first meetings with the class you should spend considerable time spelling out the expectations you have for students and the rules that will govern classroom behavior. Rules governing class time, homework, tardiness, calling out, acting out, fighting, and so on should be thoroughly discussed and finally agreed upon by class members. Your rule enforcement system should be explained and then carried out consistently. When students misbehave, it is a good idea to remind them of the rule that has been broken and the reasons why the rule exists.

First Class

Whenever possible, criticisms of students should be private and individualized, rather than public or communal. Public correction may cause students to lose face before their peers. As a result, students may retalitate against the teacher in an effort to regain lost status. Private corrections are less threatening, more personal, more productive and do not generally invite defiance.

Private Criticism

Group commands and reprimands are easy to ignore and, where possible, should be avoided. Rather than saying, "I want everyone to get busy," it is more effective to talk directly to specific students. For example, you might say "Tom and Joe, please stop talking and get down to work."

Never employ idle threats. ("If you keep making noise in class, I'll see to it that you never play sports in this school again.") Warning students about consequences you can't make happen adds to a negative classroom

atmosphere and invites students not to take you or your threats seriously. Small consequences, consistently employed, are much more effective than warnings of large scale punishments that will never be carried out.

Try to organize your classroom so that you have maximum control over student attention and can easily tell what students are doing. Minimize distractions and do not allow students to draw you off task. Try to move through the first phase of the basic skills instructional system as quickly and efficiently as possible.

THE DAILY REVIEW PHASE OF THE BASIC SKILLS INSTRUCTIONAL SYSTEM IS DISCUSSED IN SECTION IV, HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT. SEE PAGE 23.

Section II: Development

Description of the Development Phase of Instruction

Instruction For Understanding

The development phase of the Basic Skills Instructional System is devoted to direct instruction. It is during this phase that you introduce a new concept or basic skill to the class. Your objective is to give instruction to ensure that *all students* achieve a basic understanding of the material you are presenting.

Typically the development portion of the class begins with teacher instruction and continues until students have had meaningful practice in putting the day's skill or concept to use. The development segment of the class begins with instruction and does not end until the teacher is assured, through assessment, that all students have a working grasp of the day's material.

Introduce Basic Concept

At the beginning of the development phase you should introduce one basic concept. Care must be taken to use instructional strategies that maximize students' understanding. The emphasis at this point is on *comprehension*, not memorization. Explain the skill or concept of the day and demonstrate its application. To do this successfully, you should have an explanation plan in mind, concrete examples ready, and questions prepared in advance to assess student understanding.

Explanation And Demonstration

Questioning

As the lesson proceeds, the number of questions you pose to students should increase. Give students an opportunity to verbalize their understanding, identify areas of

misunderstanding, and ask for further instruction when it is needed.

Stay on Track

As the discussion between you and your students increases, it is important that you do not let the conversation wander. Student attention must be kept on the topic at hand. Use praise to reinforce student effort and achievement; adjust the difficulty of questions as understanding increases, and provide corrective feedback whenever necessary.

Stumbling Blocks

Push for Understanding

Many students, especially remedial students, revert to memorization when confronted with concepts, skills or rules. However, memorization without meaning does not constitute knowledge and is easily forgotten. Your task, therefore, is to elevate student understanding beyond mere memorization. Student anxiety is increased when they cannot retain meaningless information, cannot transfer memorized skills to new situations or use knowledge to detect absurd answers. All of this interrupts learning and retards academic self-confidence. Therefore, it is important that you include a good deal of developmental work whenever new skills and concepts are introduced.

Effective Teaching Behaviors

Have Clear Objectives

To assure that the developmntal segment of the lesson proceeds effectively, you must do some planning. First, you should be clear on the specific skill you are teaching and must understand that skill so thoroughly that you need not think about it and can concentrate on student understanding and misunderstanding.

Second, you should have a plan for the presentation of the concept or skill of the day. Of course, this doesn't mean that you must write out a minute-by-minute script, but only that you have a clear instructional plan in mind that you can adjust to fit the evolving classroom situation.

Demonstrate

Once the day's concept has been presented, it is important that you actively demonstrate the concept or skill in use. It is only when students observe a concept or skill being applied to specific problems that abstract lessons take on concrete meaning. Don't move too fast. Give students the time they need to understand the material you are presenting. If you move too quickly to the next phase of the lesson, your students will fail to grasp what's been taught, and anxiety or frustration (yours and theirs) will increase. If you move too slowly, however, students may become bored and unruly.

Maximize Student Attention

Everything you do should be done with the specific goal of maximizing student attention to the task at hand. The trick here is to avoid distractions or situations which will confuse students. A poor explanation will cause confusion and encourage students to think about other things. Confusion will elevate frustration, and frustration hinders learning. It also invites disruption.

Assess Student Comprehension

After a period of explanation and active demonstration, you should begin to assess student comprehension. The two most common modes of assessment are 1) oral questioning and 2) written seat work.

Through Product Oriented Questioning

Effective teachers use brief, product-oriented questions. Product questions are designed to assess whether or not a student can use a concept to solve a problem and produce a correct answer. Praise is an effective tool for rewarding correct answers. At the same time you can use praise to reinforce the process the student used to obtain the correct answer. For example, after a student has given a correct answer, you might say, "Good, Bob. That's right *because* . . . . ."

Through Practice Problems

A second and generally more informative method for assessing student comprehension is having students work practice problems. Here again, it is important for teachers to keep their goals in mind. The purpose at this stage of the lesson is to assess student comprehension and not to emphasize speed. Thus, you may want to give the class one problem at a time, allow every student sufficient time to work out the problem, and proceed to a discussion of that problem before moving on to the next. Depending on the difficulty of the task at hand, this stage of the lesson can usually be completed in three to seven minutes.

Reteach To Insure Understanding

When students cannot answer your questions or the assigned problems correctly, you will have to teach the material again. Where possible, different examples should be used; but when this is not possible, verbatim repetition is acceptable. After a few minutes of reinstruction you can again begin questioning or assigning problems to assess understanding. It is imperative that student understanding be assessed before work is begun. This will avoid students practicing errors.

Controlled Practice Follows Understanding

When student comprehension is satisfactory, the *controlled practice* portion of the lesson can begin. Because students have already gained a conceptual understanding of the material and successfully demonstrated their ability to use the concepts, they should be ready to increase their speed, accuracy and proficiency. However, you must monitor seat work carefully to ensure that students are working successfully and are concentrating on the task at hand. During the controlled practice portion of the lesson, it is wise to assign only one or two problems at a time. This allows you to give students feedback on their work every minute or so. Students will enhance their skills and you will identify areas where their understanding is not yet sufficient. The minute-by-minute feedback process has another advantage; all students will be actively working on a problem at the same time. Twenty students are not passively watching while one pupil works a problem at the board. Time is being used efficiently, the momentum of the lesson is being maintained, and students are getting immediate feedback.

Holding Students Accountable During Controlled Practice

During controlled practice exercises, you must continually remind students verbally and by your actions that they are being held accountable for the quality of their work. Your feedback should be immediate and continuous. You should alert students that you are paying attention to what they're doing, that you expect their best effort, and that you will check their answers.

By *accountability* we mean actual checking of students' work. Accountability serves several

Function of Accountability

functions. It allows the teacher to assess student work while maintaining the momentum of the class. It provides immediate feedback to students. It also guarantees student competence has been achieved before you proceed on to the practice phase of the lesson.

Review of Developmental Phase of Instruction

To sum up, the developmental phase of the lesson requires the following from you:

A. A brief introduction identifying prerequisite skills for task at hand.

B. A carefully planned presentation of concepts and skills that provides meaningful comprehension through demonstration and explanation.

C. An assessment of student comprehension through active questioning and supervised practice.

D. Expanded explanations when necessary.

E. Practice opportunities for students.

   a. Practice should be short (one or two problems at a time).

   b. Students must be held accountable for assigned practice problems.

   c. Students are provided praise, corrective feedback, and process explanations ("that's right because.. ").

   d. When the students' success rate is high, the class moves into the seatwork portion of the lesson. Students are given the opportunity for uninterrupted practice.

Section III: Seatwork

Description of the Seatwork Phase of Instruction

Seatwork Practice

Seatwork is the practice portion of the lesson where students work individually on assigned problems. Because seatwork practice follows the controlled practice portion of the lesson, students already have the knowledge they need to work independently on seatwork assignments. Practice in this phase of the lesson provides an opportunity for *immediate application* and successful practice of what has been learned. The aim of this phase is to consolidate learning and to increase students' proficiency in a specific, narrow area. New material is not introduced and old material is not reviewed at this time.

Stumbling Blocks

Monitoring Seatwork

Research indicates that seatwork is often perceived by students as a waste of time. That is unfortunate because seatwork provides students with the successful practice needed to increase skill and enhance skill memory. It is important that students be kept on task during seatwork assignments. Therefore, teachers should circulate around the class, hold students accountable, gently bring off-task students back to task, and provide help, praise and corrective feedback when it is needed.

Clear Assignment

Your first task during this phase is to *make the seatwork assignment clear*. Your second task is to get the students started on their seatwork quickly. This will take planning and "withitness." Some students will need to sharpen their pencils, others will need

Get Students On Task

Plan Ahead

materials, some will want to engage in private conversations. It is important that you not let these activities disrupt the momentum of the class. Students must be given notice that they are about to do seatwork, and materials must be kept close at hand. Student talking should be held to a minimum. You must move the class smoothly from the developmental portion of the lesson to the controlled segment and then on to individual seatwork. The natural progression of these activities will minimize disruption and maximize the effective use of time.

10 - 15 Minutes of Seatwork

Effective Teaching Behaviors The purpose of seatwork is to provide students with an opportunity for *successful practice*. Ten or fifteen minutes of seatwork each day should be sufficient. That usually gives time enough for students to increase proficiency and is short enough to avoid boredom and behavior problems.

Assignments Should Extend Skills and Foster Success

Seatwork should be designed to *extend student skills* while avoiding frustration. When assigned seatwork is too difficult, students will become discouraged and give up. If it is too easy, they will not take their work seriously. The goal, therefore, is to find a happy medium between these two extremes. However, if you are to err, it should be in the direction of simplicity rather than difficulty. Remedial students need to experience success. They have already experienced more than their share of failure.

Plan your assigned seatwork so that the average student can complete it in 15 minutes. The goal is to fashion assignments that

approximately 75 percent of the class can complete in the allotted time. Students should understand that you are emphasizing accuracy. You want students to complete as many problems as they can accurately. You should tell students when they are doing well, are on task and are doing their work correctly.

Emphasize Accuracy

The successful completion of the seatwork portion of the class is most likely to occur when you pay attention to the following principles:

Maintain Momentum

First, it is important that students get involved in seatwork immediately following the seatwork assignment. This is most likely to be accomplished if you are able to maintain the momentum of the class and can minimize sharp breaks between one segment of instruction and the next. For example, it is helpful if the problems presented in the seatwork portion of the class are similar to the questions presented in the development portion of the class. The transition between the two events might be accomplished by the simple statement: "You have found the topic sentence in the first two paragraphs on your work sheet. In the time we have remaining, underline the topic sentence in paragraphs 3 through 10."

Keeping Students on Task

Second, momentum will be maintained and breaks in instruction will be minimized if you begin to monitor student activity immediately after making the seatwork assignment. Therefore, before giving help to any individual student, you should make sure that the entire class has gotten down to work. Students who fail to get on task can be set to work simply by walking in the student's direction. If that fails, a

quiet statement such as "Mary, it's time for you to begin your work sheet," should be tried. Such a statement is useful because it alerts the student to what needs to be done without drawing the pupil into a confrontation. Rhetorical questions such as "Tommy, why can't you behave?" are counterproductive. Such statements invite a response from Tommy. They heighten negative affect in the classroom and interrupt the academic momentum of the class.

Assisting Students

Once all students are at work, you can attend to those students who need special help. It is good to provide quick assistance to students who need help. Students should be able to call on you for help by some prearranged signal, such as hand-raising. It is probably counterproductive to have students line up at your desk for help. Valuable time is lost and students are encouraged to get off task. Moving around the class allows you to maintain general control of your interaction with students while remaining aware of the momentum of the class. It is generally a bad idea to give lengthy feedback to one student if other students are waiting for your help.

Alerting Students to Accountability

A third teaching behavior which contributes to successful seatwork is alerting. You must continually alert the class that students are expected to be at work and that their work will be checked. If students are aware that their seatwork will not be checked, it is unlikely that they will put much effort into its completion. If they think that the work will not be checked until the next day, they are likely to put the work off until later. However, a teacher who

states clearly "Your work will be checked at the end of the period," is more likely to keep students on task during seatwork. Students who consistently are held accountable will get into the habit of getting down to work.

Avoid Interruptions

Fourth, you should maintain an environment conducive to successful seatwork. That is, you should not make announcements during the seatwork portion of the class, you should avoid interruptions from the outside, and you should not tolerate students interrupting the work of others. Once students are at work, it doesn't make sense to distract them.

Holding Students Accountable

A fifth principle of effective seatwork has been implied in the preceding paragraph. Students must be held accountable for their work. *Accountability* is the actual checking of student seatwork. During the controlled practice portion of the lesson, accountability was immediate. That is, students received immediate feedback regarding the accuracy or inaccuracy of their answers. During seatwork, however, students are working more independently. They need time for *uninterrupted practice*. Thus, the actual checking of seatwork should be delayed until the end of the lesson. At that time, you can hold students publicly accountable by calling on individual students and asking them to answer specific questions. Such a method gives you a chance to correct misunderstandings. It may not be necessary for you to correct every answer on every worksheet. If, at the end of the seatwork period, you ask students to give the answer to a few assigned problems, you will have accomplished the accountability mission

Check Seatwork by Calling On

while gauging the general proficiency of the class. If misunderstandings are corrected at this point, there is less likelihood that students will make large mistakes on their homework.

Call on Lowest Achievers First

When conducting the review of seatwork, it is advisable to call on your lowest achieving students first. This will guarantee that the students most in need of success experiences will get the rewards they need. It will also reduce the frustration that could follow from not completing every problem, and it will heighten the probability that you will catch and correct widespread mistakes and misunderstandings. Naturally, it is important that you increase your expectations for low-achieving students as they progress during the year.

Collect Seatwork

Finally, all seatwork should be collected to further enforce accountability. If it is possible to grade seatwork, then it is useful to do so. When this is not possible, it is still necessary for you to give a quick look at student papers to spot those that are unduly incomplete, carelessly done, impossible to read, or otherwise unacceptable. Students doing poor work should be alerted that their seatwork performance is not up to par. In such cases, it is important that you pay close attention to that student's seatwork and to insist upon improvement.

Check Seatwork for Problems

IV. Homework

Description of the Homework Phase of Instruction

Distribute Practice Time

Reading and Language Arts homework should be done outside of class. There is good evidence that student performance is improved by practice when it is spread over time. If you delay making your homework assignment until the end of the seatwork portion of the class, you will ensure that the students will distribute their practice time.

Stumbling Blocks

Misusing Homework

Homework used to be an integral part of school life. Some school systems began to move away from homework when it was realized that homework assignments were not achieving their desired effect. Long and tedious assignments bored students and encouraged them to be careless. Sometimes students were only moderately prepared in class for the homework they faced at night. Thus, students practiced mistakes. Sometimes assignments were given merely to please or appease parents, and, on occasion, teachers neglected to make assignments relevant to class objectives.

Well Designed Homework

While it is true that homework can be misused, we need not conclude that homework should be abandoned. Properly designed assignments can be enormously beneficial. Good assignments allow students to distribute their practice and to reinforce classroom learning. With proper preparation, student frustration is minimized and success maximized.

Homework Should Fit Objectives

If we want students to take their homework seriously, it is imperative that teachers take it seriously too. Homework assignments must be relevant to class objectives. You should stress the *importance and value* of homework assignments and explain its importance to your students. You can further enforce the importance of homework by collecting and scoring all assignments.

Signal the Importance of Homework

It is helpful if parents understand the importance of homework and monitor their children's work. It is a wise practice to inform parents of your homework policy, to ask their support in encouraging the completion of homework, and to keep parents abreast of their children's homework performance. The message that homework is important will be strengthened if there is a school-wide homework policy, supported and communicated by the school's administration.

Making Homework Effective

To sum up, research in education supports the following conclusions about homework.

1. Well-designed homework assignments generally increase achievement and improve student attitudes toward reading and language arts.

2. Short assignments have been found to be most effective.

3. Some variety in the kind of homework assigned heightens student interest and decreases boredom.

4. Teachers should stress the importance of homework verbally and by regularly collecting and correcting assignments.

Effective Teaching Behaviors

We suggest the following:

Four Days of Homework

1. Give the students their homework assignment at the end of every class, Monday through Thursday. Make it clear that assignments are due the next day. Explain that the class has gone over the information needed to complete the assignment, that students have practiced doing work similar to the homework assignment, and that you will collect assignments at the *beginning of class* on the following day.

15 to 20 Minutes of Homework

2. Homework assignments should be short and should not take more than 15 minutes to complete. Students should not be allowed to do their homework during class.

Assignments Should Cover Class Material

3. Each day's assignment should cover the major ideas presented in the class on that day. When possible, the assignments given on Tuesday and Wednesday should include some of the material covered earlier in the week. This will further extend student practice.

Thursday's Assignment Should Review Week's Material

4. When possible, Thursday's assignment should be devoted to a review of the entire week's work. In order to cover the material and to give students sufficient practice, Thursday's assignment may be a bit longer than the work assigned on other days. Still, it

is best not to have this assignment extend beyond 25 minutes. If the material can be sufficiently covered in less time, that is, of course, desirable.

Collect and Correct Homework

5. Each assignment should be collected and corrected. It is not imperative that you do the correcting. Indeed, when you have 120, 150, or more students, it is virtually impossible for you to keep up with this amount of work. Under such conditions it may be wise for you to allow students to exchange papers, check for errors, and record the number of correct answers at the top of the page. When it is done, it is naturally important that you monitor the class's work to insure that students are effectively performing their assigned tasks. When this procedure is finished, papers can be passed back to their owners for a brief examination. Students should pass their assignments in so you can spot-check them and record their scores in your grade book.

Record Assignments

6. It will assist planning and the achievement of long-term goals if you record daily assignments in your teacher's log.

Characteristics of Good Homework Assignments

Short assignments given on a daily basis serve useful purposes. They hold student interest and reinforce student success. They complement seatwork by distributing practice over time without putting undue pressure on students. They minimize failure. They allow you to monitor every student's progress and to intervene when a student misunderstands a

lesson, or begins to withdraw from class work. Patterns of student achievement will emerge and provide you with information about the progress of every student. Frequent assignments allow you to cover material through a variety of formats such as games, stories, puzzles, and so on. Perhaps most important of all, graded homework gives each student regular and immediate feedback on his or her own performance. If the teaching system we are suggesting in this manual is followed, every student will receive immediate and regular feedback on their work. Students will experience academic success and their confidence will begin to grow.

Correcting Homework in Class

It is not necessary for you to correct all assignments; students can do some of this work. Exchanging papers is an effective means for correcting papers if you circulate around the classroom and monitor what students are doing. Efficiency is improved if you have prepared answers beforehand and have recorded them on a transparency or on the blackboard. This will avoid the necessity of repeating answers, will maintain class momentum, and will allow you to move freely around the classroom.

Reteaching Homework Material

If the teaching phase of each class is performed successfully, there should be little need for a reteaching of homework during the next day's class. Student difficulties or errors will usually be caught and remediated prior to seatwork on the previous day.

More on Reteaching

When it becomes clear that the class has had trouble with a particular assignment, it will be

necessary to reteach the previous day's lesson beginning with the development phase, moving on to controlled practice, assigning seatwork, and finally giving a homework assignment that repeats the day's material. Under these conditions, it is wise for you to restrict lesson material to yesterday's topics and not to add new ideas. The key to this teaching method is not that students move through a text quickly, but rather, that every student gains a full understanding and mastery of each day's material before moving on. Confusions are caught early and remediated immediately. Misunderstandings are dealt with quickly so that they will not cause confusion in the future.

Teachers Correct Thursday's Assignment

You should score Thursday's homework personally. This will allow you to assess the kinds of errors being made and will give you the information you need to plan and structure the weekly review period.

Homework Should Count 25% of Student Grade

Since homework takes a good deal of effort and time, it is recommended that it count 25 percent of their marking period grade. It is, of course, important that students understand this.

Let Parents Know

Parents should be informed about the homework policy of your class which, hopefully, coincides with the homework policy of the school.

Reviewing the Benefits of Homework

We have emphasized that this manual does not present a list of teaching suggestions so much as it constitutes an integrated system of teaching. Homework is related to all the other

components of the teaching plan. Homework assignments provide an opportunity for students to supplement the practice that began in class, to extend their understanding of the material presented during development time, and to briefly review some materials learned earlier in the week. Practice is distributed over time, mistakes are caught quickly, and students have an opportunity to correct difficulties they encountered during seatwork. The structure of this teaching system allows students to monitor their own understanding, to correct mistakes, and to take an active part in their education. It reinforces the point that students are responsible for their own learning. At the same time, it allows you to monitor the day-to-day progress of each student and to intervene when the need arises. Students who have a history of academic failure will be given the support they need, the positive reinforcement they hunger for, the experience of success, and immediate remediation when their understanding falters. You will be better able to help your pupils because you will have day-by-day information regarding student performance.

Homework provides you with information you need to structure and plan the material to be covered in the review component. It distributes student practice over time and gives you more time for in-class instruction.

Part V: Special Review/Maintenance

Description of the Special Review/Maintenance Phase

Reviewing to Maintain Learning

It will come as no surprise to you that children do *not* remember everything they are taught. We need not conclude from this that education is impossible. Research reminds us that students are likely to retain knowledge and skills when subject matter is reviewed and skills are practiced on a regular basis. The teaching system presented in the manual maximizes review and practice while avoiding the boredom of endless repetition. BSIS emphasizes meaning and comprehension. The goal is not to get students to parrot what they have been taught, but to *understand* the meaning of what has been taught so that they can put their new-found knowledge and skills to work in the world. The purpose of grammar, for example, is not to get students to memorize parts of speech, but rather, to provide the information students need to write a coherent and grammatically correct sentence. We have provided for regular student practices so that high level proficiency and understanding can be maintained.

Stumbling Blocks

Reinforcing Learning

When state legislators and news magazines discuss falling test scores, they often conclude that teachers are not spending sufficient time teaching basic skills. However, the failure may not be found in the absence of instruction, but rather, in the absence of practice and reinforcement- the elements necessary for the maintenance of learning. Newly learned material is most vulnerable to forgetting; even

material which has been "mastered" is often lost if it is not practiced. If we review language arts textbooks from the 4th grade through high school, we will discover that students are taught grammar every year. Yet many of the students you face show little or no evidence of ever having been exposed to grammar. This may be because the teaching of grammar is compressed into a short period during each school year and is not adequately reviewed. Further, there is evidence that the teaching of grammar has become compartmentalized so that students are not held accountable for what they have learned in grammar lessons when they write papers, stories, complete tests, or compose thank-you letters to class visitors.

Effective Teaching Behaviors

Monday Sessions

To avoid the problem of one-shot teaching and compartmentalized instruction, we suggest that you incorporate review and maintenance sessions into your regular language arts and reading instruction. We suggest you devote a portion of each Monday class to a weekly review/maintenance session and every fourth Monday to a cumulative review/maintenance session. The purpose of these review sessions is to help students retain concepts and skills learned throughout the year.

Tips for Weekly Review

Weekly Review/Maintenance. The following tips may help you implement effective weekly review/maintenance sessions.

1. Devote approximately half of Monday's class period (roughly 25 minutes) to review and maintenance.

2. Plan the session to review important concepts covered during the previous week. Your review of Thursday's homework assignment will be helpful in this regard. It is suggested that you plan your review session in accordance with the following structure:

   a. The first material to be reviewed should be skills and information you believe have already been mastered. This will get the class off to a quick start and will provide students with success at the start of the day.

   b. Next, present the material that you expect students will find most difficult.

   c. In this class, just as in other classes, instruction should be followed by assessment. Student performance during the controlled practice session will tell you if students need further instruction.

It is important that *all* the major concepts and skills covered during the last week be reviewed during Monday's class. Reviewing material that students have already mastered will help students retain information. Some material can be reviewed quickly. Instruction will be necessary whenever students have forgotten material presented during the week. However, if the Basic Skills Instructional System is followed carefully, student misunderstandings and confusions during Monday's class should be easily corrected. You will be reminding students of what they recently understood rather than instructing students on material they have never seen before.

Review sessions cover familiar material and thus risk boredom. This is especially true when students are called upon one at a time. You will probably find it more efficient to get all students working on a problem, to give students time to complete the problem, and then call on a specific student to answer the problem. Here again, it is important to remind students of their accountability and to demonstrate accountability by asking students to explain and/or demonstrate their answers and how they arrived at them. Use of the chalkboard is often helpful in this regard.

Provide Practice

Cumulative Review/Maintenance. The cumulative review/maintenance portion of this teaching program is designed to provide for further practice and review of student learning. Every fourth Monday the entire class period should be devoted to a review and maintenance session covering the last month's work. Because the class reviews four weeks' work, it replaces the regular maintenance Monday review session. However, the work of the past week is included in the review session.

Start Easy

Here again it is wise to begin the class by covering the material that students understand best. Planning should allow for more time to be devoted to those areas where students have experienced the most difficulty. You may find it necessary to reteach some material and it is important that students have an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding through controlled practice and seatwork and to further their practice through homework.

You can see, our system of instruction builds in

Keep Review Interesting

review and practice during the class period, through homework, after a week's work, and at the end of the month. If properly applied, the system should virtually guarantee student progress in your class. However, continued repetition courts boredom. Therefore, we encourage you to bring thought and creativity to how you present and review material and to the assignments you give your students. The more interesting and varied your format, the more likely it is that you will keep students interested and motivated. The use of games, student-generated tasks, cooperative learning exercises, quiz show formats, plays, radio scripts and so on are all to be encouraged as long as the activity clearly serves the objectives of the day. Activities which are fun but academically superfluous will carry the message that you do not value academic achievement. If you do not value achievement, then there is little reason to suppose that students will either.

On some occasions, of course, it will be necessary to reschedule the review day from Monday. For example, Monday's review could prevent students from completing reading material they are interested in or may interrupt the flow of a grammar unit. School holidays or school events may cut into class time. In such cases, it is acceptable to move the review session to Tuesday or Wednesday. It is important, however, not to put off reviews by more than a day or two. It is also important to note the rescheduling in your teacher's log.

Prologue: A Word of Caution

The history of education is replete with instructional fads that promised miracles but accomplished little or nothing. We have learned to be suspicious of miracle cure claims and do not wish to add our names to the long list of snake oil vendors that have promised that their magic potions would cure all educational ills.

The system we have outlined in this manual works, but it doesn't work miracles. When conscientiously employed by friendly, diligent teachers, most compensatory students will gain greater mastery of the basic skills and perform better on achievement tests of low-level cognitive material. The Basic Skills Instructional System can make a significant contribution to Florida's effort to boost the achievement levels of low-achieving students. It goes without saying that this is a desirable goal. But is it enough? We think not.

Certainly students who have not yet mastered the basic skills need remediation. A young adult who cannot read with comprehension, write with clarity or cipher accurately has little to look forward to in our increasingly technical society. But these skills, though necessary, are not sufficient today. To have a chance at earning economic security and taking part in the decision-making process of our democratic society, a high school graduate must have the ability to think critically.

The instructional system outlined in this manual will help students master basic skills. It will not help them develop higher level cognitive skills. It will not enhance abstract thinking, creativity, or complex problem-solving. All these skills, that together we call critical intelligence, constitute a fundamental aim of education in America. The Basic Skills Instructional System will not, by itself, bring schools closer to achieving that aim.

Why, then, do we recommended its use? Because the system works for the limited aim of mastering skills. And as students in academic difficulty begin to see that in fact they can learn to read

and write, they will be more receptive to more challenging lessons. As Compensatory Education teachers see students mastering low-level material, they will be more receptive to raising their standards and aiming at higher goals. As teachers work collectively to help low-achieving students; as they share with one another their problems, successes, materials and ideas, and give one another aid and encouragement; as they work as a team and build themselves into a community of problem-solving educators, they will find ways to enhance the critical intellience of their students.

We have developed this manual in the hope that it will be used and useful. We encourage teams of teachers to adopt the Basic Skills Instructional System together and we are bold enough to recommend that the teaching team follow the system closely, at least for the first year. After you have had a year's experience teaching with the system, however, and have evaluated its strengths and weaknesses, we hope that your team will find ways to improve instruction in basic skills classes even further. As you work toward that goal, we hope you will share your insights and ideas with us.